

Real World Graduation: Question 22

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17 Mar 2018

Question 22

The editor of a local newscast has received four stories from his reporting staff on a certain day. The four stories concern a) an armed robbery in which two victims were stabbed, but not fatally; b) a local woman who claims to have proof that wearing white underwear causes skin cancer, although she has made many claims over the years and all of them have been proven incorrect; c) the Governor made a speech at a local hotel outlining his budget recommendations for next year; and d) the owner of a popular local restaurant was arrested for drug possession. Which of these stories will lead off that evening's newscast and why?

- a) The armed robbery story, because violent crime affects the most people in the community.
- b) The white underwear story, because it provides people with important information to help them protect their health.
- c) The Governor's speech, because it is required by law.
- d) The restaurant owners arrest, because people want to know if the restaurant will still be open.
- e) They will be broadcast according to the chronological order in which the four events occurred that day.

Answer to Question 22

This is a trick question. All the answers are wrong.

Answer a) is wrong because violent crime does not affect most people in the community, it only affected these two victims. Answer b) is wrong because the claim is patently ludicrous on its face. Answer c) is wrong because no states have passed such a law. Answer d) is wrong because only a tiny minority of a city's population visits the restaurant in a given week, and so is not newsworthy. Answer e) is wrong because it is the editor's job to decide what news is of greatest importance and broadcast in that order.

So how does the editor do this? The editor knows his audience, and has a sense of what types of stories are likely to attract the most viewers, which in turn allows the station to increase the advertising revenue. So, it is the editor's job to choose the lead story based on his estimate of which one will cause the most viewers to tune in, which increases ratings, which increases advertising rates. He does this based on his experience with the audience in that community. The armed robbery story will lead if it is likely that constitutes the latest in a series of crimes, which taps into the public's interest in general safety. The underwear story will lead if the editor believes he gets the largest audience with the outlandish and sensational. The Governor speech will lead if it contains dramatic changes from last year, or if the station (or editor) has a strong position of support or opposition to the Governor's agenda. The restaurant owners arrest will lead if he is famous for something else besides owning the restaurant, especially if he can be represented as some sort of hypocrite. The selection of topics and stories on newscasts is based primarily on advertising revenue.